

## 2. The Partners

The goal of the I-405 Corridor Program to develop a comprehensive transportation strategy for the entire corridor presented a daunting but necessary challenge to the communities and program partners. Mobilization required the equal participation and commitment of all program decision makers to work overtime towards a common goal. After two years of broad-based public outreach and environmental review, the Program achieved agreement among program representatives from each city and agency in the corridor on an inclusive and balanced plan for transportation solutions for I-405.

### Community Partnership

The I-405 Corridor Program was based on a joint decision-making process between the Program co-leads, partners and the public. The co-lead agencies were the Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority (Sound Transit) and the King County Department of Transportation.



The program's success rested on the staggering task of cooperation between a broad and varied collection of communities and interests from a 15-city corridor spanning over 30 miles. Corridor interests included residents, business owners and environmental agencies supporting a wide variety of philosophies on effective transportation modes ranging from HOV, transit, freight and single occupancy vehicles (SOVs). The co-leads also recognized the need to sensitively navigate the pre-program rift that had arisen between roadway supporters and transit-only proponents.

A previous effort to solve the corridor's traffic problems saw limited success due to the lack of participation by all the communities in the corridor. Program leaders encouraged and emphasized ongoing participation in the program decision-making from the general public, elected officials, and the cities and counties affected by I-405 to overcome this earlier challenge.

## Project Committees

The program's three committees (see Appendix B) consisted of over 80 members providing direction, feedback and promoting regional consensus for the Program's decisions.

**Citizen Committee:** Citizens representing a wide range of business, environmental, freight, modal and neighborhood groups.

**Steering Committee:** Technical staff representing area municipalities, environmental and regulatory agencies and transportation service providers.

**Executive Committee:** Local, state and federal officials made the final recommendation of solutions, using input from the public and the other program committees and project management team.



Figure 2-1

The structure of the three-committee decision-making process facilitated the flow of information between committee members and the project management team as well as the facilitation of a common understanding of program issues and decisions. The committees adopted an aggressive schedule to meet program demands, meeting more than 80 times collectively over the course of two years. In addition, Program staff and committee members provided briefings to neighborhood associations, and civic and business interest groups throughout the corridor.

The program was able to make record decision-making progress compared to similar transportation improvement projects in other parts of the country. The work of the committees and the public involvement program were integrated within the required NEPA process and the EIS. Figure 2-1 shows the relationship between the three committees and the public.

## Public Involvement Program

Community input was gathered through a wide-ranging public involvement program that included open houses, workshops, media outreach, online surveys and regularly distributed project information. Outreach activities were designed to encourage and foster the participation of all corridor communities and interests by working towards the following goals:

- Create accessible and responsive decision-making process by building ownership of solutions by all jurisdictions, interest groups and public
- Generate range of reasonable and feasible solutions acceptable to corridor communities
- Comply with public involvement legal requirements at each stage of environmental review process

The public involvement program goals were met by realizing the following objectives:

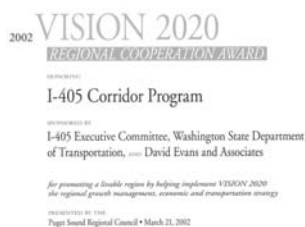
- Provide all parties with a clear understanding of transportation problems on I-405
- Instill a belief that the program can accomplish something meaningful, but with the understanding that it will require tough choices to be made
- Give interest groups opportunities for meaningful dialogue and creative problem solving

- Disseminate information to the public in a clear and timely manner
- Make program information easily accessible to anyone interested at any time
- Deliver information to target audiences in most efficient, cost-effective manner possible

With these goals and objectives in mind, a public opinion survey and interviews with neighborhood leaders were conducted to identify the participants' level of support for possible solutions. The public opinion phone survey, conducted in February 2001, included 1200 randomly selected corridor residents.

The public outreach program included nine public meetings held in multiple cities along the corridor, four special topic workshops to allow more discussion time on specific issues, and over 175 community briefings. Thousands of residents and businesses also received regularly distributed project newsletters, e-mail updates and Citizen Guides that provided up-to-date information on project progress and milestones. A detailed project website provided committee members, interest groups and the public with easy access to project information, the Community Calendar, media articles, solution descriptions and committee meeting materials.

In addition, the project team conducted interviews with community service organizations that serve "special populations," including non-English speakers, the elderly and low-income residents, to identify the appropriate languages, communication channels and activities to reach these populations. The program reached out to these "special populations" by distributing translated Program materials in the three most used non-English languages.



Media outreach was also critical to effectively reach the entire corridor population (500,000+) and increase visibility of program messages and progress. Program partners were heavily involved in the media outreach and served as credible third party spokespeople. Extensive efforts were made to brief reporters on the technical details of the program, resulting in more informed Program coverage. Media relation efforts resulted in approximately 150 print, radio and television stories, and 10 editorials and op-ed pieces over a two-year period.

Recognizing a job well done, the Program was awarded the Puget Sound Regional Council Vision 2020 Award and the Public Relations Society of America 2001 Totem Award for achieving extensive regional cooperation and practicing an outstanding community outreach program. The Program was also awarded the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials' Smart Moves Award: Transportation Strategies for Smart Growth, the Association for Commuter Transportation Excellence in Public Leadership for its TDM program and the National Association of Environmental Professionals Presidents Environmental Excellence Award.

## A Collaborative Process

The I-405 Corridor Program was a national demonstration pilot of the “Reinventing NEPA” process that moves NEPA (National Environmental Protection Act) decision-making to the early stages of transportation projects. The process includes three “concurrence” points and nine “consensus” points at key milestones and decision points within the NEPA process to ensure increased communication and coordination between involved agencies and jurisdictions. Agencies with jurisdiction include resource, regulatory and jurisdictional agencies with permit actions or regulatory authority over the projects. These agencies have chartered responsibilities to review the status of the I-405 Corridor Program at each decision point.



The three concurrence points were: (1) purpose and need statement; (2) selection of alternatives to advance for detailed study in the Draft EIS; and (3) selection of the preferred alternative and mitigation concept in the Final EIS.

At each concurrence point, the agencies with jurisdiction had the responsibility to approve, deny or comment on the decisions. A written concurrence with the Statement of Purpose and Need for the Program was received from each participating agency during the fall of 1999. Written confirmation of concurrence with the range of alternatives to advance for detailed study in the Draft EIS was received from each participating agency with jurisdiction during the summer and fall of 2000. For the latter concurrence point, several agencies attached comments to their concurrence identifying specific areas of interest or concern, related to future analysis and review. Concurrence on the selection of a Preferred Alternative was achieved in Winter 2002.

The nine consensus points are less formal than concurrence and typically address issues that are important, but less weighty than those requiring concurrence. Consensus was defined as substantial agreement among the agencies with jurisdiction; it does not require unanimity about a decision. In all cases, agreement must be strong enough that the agencies are committed to implementing the decision. Resolution of concurrence and consensus points by the agencies with jurisdiction during the I-405 Corridor Program process is included in Appendix B. Consensus points occurred at the following milestones in the Reinventing NEPA process:

- Statement of Purpose and Need (draft and final)
- Initial screening criteria for alternatives
- Fatal flaw elimination of alternatives
- Identification of additional data needs
- Second-level screening of alternatives
- Alternatives to include in Draft EIS
- Decision to publish Draft EIS
- Preferred alternative in Final EIS
- Decision to publish Final EIS

